Comparative Study of Japanese and English Sociolinguistic Patterns of Making Requests

Kayoko Shiomi and Keiichi Nakabachi

概要

この論文では，日常あるいはビジネスの場でも頻繁に行われる発話行為の一つである「依頼」に関して日英比較を行い，異なる場面において話者が聞き手にどのように依頼を行うか，その発話行為の特徴を調べる。対象はアメリカ人学生と日本人学生で，それぞれが友人に依頼を行う上で用いる発話数や発話構造のパターン，意味公式や方略などに関して口頭で応えたデータを基に分析を行い，日英語の言語使用あるいは言語運用に関して類似点と差異を分析する。この研究は，英語学習者あるいは日本語学習者の中間言語使用に関しての研究の一環であるが，母語と目標言語あるいは第一言語と第二言語を比較する上では，まず母語の特徴を知る必要があるため，今回は日本語と英語母語話者の依頼構造および意味公式の使い方を中心に依頼文の特徴を分析考察する。

Key words: Speech act, request, sociolinguistic competence

I. INTRODUCTION

Asking someone a favor or making a request is commonly practiced in daily life. It can be face-threatening since the speaker may make the hearer obligated to do what the

speaker asks to do or the hearer may not be able to respond positively to the speaker's request. Considering the face-threatening nature of requests, making requests is not always easy even in a native language, let alone in a foreign language. However, in order to communicate and interact with others smoothly in a native or foreign language, acquiring grammatical knowledge about the language alone will not be sufficient. Even if the sentence itself may be grammatically correct, it may sometimes sound odd or out of place, depending on a given context. Therefore, one must know the pragmatic use of the language. That is, one needs to be able to use the language appropriately in given situations.

"Communicative competence," the term originally coined by Hymes (1979), is regarded as an important factor for language learning. Canale (1983) later redefined and categorized "communicative competence" into four components: "grammatical," "sociolinguistic," "discourse," and "strategic" competences. When communicating with others in a foreign language, one needs to possess not only grammatical knowledge, but also pragmatic knowledge (i.e. knowledge of sociocultural speaking rules).

Deficiencies in the knowledge of sociolinguistic and discourse competences often lead to miscommunication between native speakers and non-native speakers. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) explained this type of miscommunication as "pragmatic failure" which is most likely to occur between speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Pragmatic failure is also seen from L1 language transfer to L2. Beebe (1988), viewing pragmatic transfer as one of sociolinguistic transfers, defines it as "transfer of L1 sociocultural communicative competence in performing L2 speech acts[1)] or any other aspects of L2 conversation, where the speaker is trying to achieve a particular function of language" (p. 56).

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) studied requests and apologies from both cross-linguistic and cross-cultural points of view under the CCSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern) in eight languages--Australian English, American English, British English, Canadaian French, German, Hebrew, and Russian. Although this was a grand-scale research project, it did not investigate Japanese language and its speech acts.

After this initial research of various languages on speech acts, research on various speech acts started to spread to other languages, including Japanese. The recent studies of

1) Speech Act: an utterance that has performative function in language is called speech act. Austin (1962) categorized the speech acts into a locutionary (the actual utterance), an illocutionary (the pragmatic force of utterance), and a perlocutionary acts (the utterance's effect). Searle (1975) later classified the illocutionary speech acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

speech acts include more variety of speech acts, such as apologies, complaints, compliments, refusals, requests, and thanks in different languages—e.g., Argentinean Spanish, Australian English, Canadian French, German, Hebrew and Japanese (CARLA-Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition). However, the descriptions of speech acts complied by CARLA take a mono-linguistic approach and do not compare one language with another. Researchers have also investigated issues in the teaching pragmatic competence (Judd 1999) or the effect of pragmatic instruction on speech act performance recently (Takahashi, 2010).

Regarding the research on Japanese and English, Beebe et al. (1990) initiated a systematic study which investigated sociolinguistic or pragmatic transfer in the English (L2) of native speakers of Japanese (L1) in refusals, which led to more research on the comparison of speech acts of Japanese leaner's of English and native speakers of English.

In this research, we will examine one of the face-threatening speech acts, i.e., the speech act of asking for favors or making requests. Data from both native and non-native speakers of English and Japanese will be collected in order to find the realization patterns of requests in L1 and L2. However, in this paper, the analysis of data will mainly be focused on the similarities and differences of requesting strategies between Americans and Japanese in their respective native languages (L1), not L2. The patterns of request orders, the semantic formula of requests, strategies of the pre- and post-requests as well as the head acts of making requests will be investigated.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Data Collection

Oral role-play responses to DCTs (Discourse Completion Tasks) were employed as a data collection method in this study, as opposed to written DCTs. There are some advantages of the oral role-play responses over the written DCTs. Firstly, since the subjects of the oral role plays have less time to respond to the questions than those of written DCTs, their responses would be spontaneous and reflect the features of natural data. Secondly, as Beebe and Cummings (1985) pointed out, a wide variety of formulas can be elicited by the oral responses. Thirdly, the subjects can answer the questions without being conscious of the length of utterances in oral responses than written responses because a designated space is not allotted in the questionnaire—i.e., there is no limited space given to each task.

2. Subjects

A total of thirty subjects joined this study, consisting of two groups: ten American native speakers of English and twenty native speakers of Japanese. Both American and Japanese informants were mostly university students in their 20s. Each subject responded orally to ten questions both in English and Japanese. The questions were all about the situations of requesting (see Appendix). The subjects were handed out the written questionnaires in English and responded orally right after they read each situation. All the subjects were also told that they were making requests to their friends in given situations, not their intimates nor bosses at work. In other words, the different use of language among the unequal social status was not investigated in this study. All responses were recorded and later transcribed.

In analyzing data, we first divided utterances employed in making requests into three parts: (1) Pre-request, (2) Request, and (3) Post-request. Pre and post-requests are simply the position of the sentences, phrases, or words. If a sentence, a phrase or a word was placed before the main request, it was considered as a pre-request, and if given after the main request, it was categorized as a post-request. In some cases, more than one request was made. Each request as well as the pre-request and post-request was counted and the patterns of the request orders were revealed.

III. FINDINGS

American and Japanese native speakers' realization patterns of requests were investigated in the following four main areas: (1) the number of utterances in making requests; (2) the semantic formulas of requests; (3) the patterns of request orders; (4) the strategies of making requests--the contents of pre- and post- requests; and (5) the structure and frequency of the "head acts" of requests. In this particular study, grammatical accuracy was not focused on. The qualitative assessments have revealed similarities and differences in the realization patterns of requests between native speakers of English and Japanese.

1. The Number of Utterances in Making Requests

Making requests can be face-threatening since the speaker may impose some burden on the hearer and the hearer may not be able do what the speaker asks, depending on the situations. Hence, the "adjuncts" to the head acts"--both "pre- & post-request" activities play important roles besides the head acts of requests themselves. Table 1 shows the total

number of utterances both American native speakers of English and Japanese native speakers of Japanese made in making requests, including address terms and pre-and post request statements in this empirical study.

Table 1. The Number of Utterances Employed in Making Requests

	AE (n=10)	JJ (n=20)
The total number of utterances	668	469
The average number of utterances per person	<66.8>	<23.45>
The average number of utterances per request	<6.68>	<2.345>

AE=American native speakers of English JJ=Japanese native speakers of Japanese

In this study Japanese university students and American university students made requests in ten different situations to their friends in responding to the oral discourse tasks. Regarding the number of utterances made in making requests to social equals, the utterances of American speakers of English were almost three times more than the utterances of Japanese speakers: in a total of ten different situations, an average of 66.8 utterances are made by English speakers per person as opposed to 23.45 by Japanese speakers per person. This empirical data revealed that American university students in the study were more verbose when asking for favors or making requests to their friends than Japanese university students.

2. The Semantic Formulas of Requests

In this section, the main semantic formulas of requests will be examined. Most of the requests made in both English and Japanese are consisted of the following elements.

Address terms (e.g., name, greeting, attention-getter, and hesitation)
+ Supportive Move (i.e. pre-request statements or questions)
+ The Head Act of Request (s)
+ Supportive Move (i.e. post-request statements or questions)

In the actual realization of requests, however, different combinations of these components are used, depending on the situations the speakers are in and who the speakers are asking favors of. Table 2 shows the structure of semantic formulas and the number of utterances used in making requests, including address terms, pre-requesting, and post-requesting utterances in our study of ten different situations.

Table 2. Structure of Semantic Formulas

	AE (n=10)	JJ (n=20)
Address Terms (name, greetings, attention-getters, etc.)		
The total number of utterances:	42	20
the number of utterances per person:	<4.2>	<1>
Supportive Move (Pre-Requests)		
the total number of utterances:	269	225
the number of utterances per person:	<26.9>	<11.25>
Head Act of Requests		
the total number of utterances:	168	155
the number of utterances per person:	<16.8>	<7.75>
Supportive Move (Post-Requests)		
the total number of utterances:	189	69
the number of utterances per person:	<18.9>	<3.45>

AE=American native speakers of English JJ=Japanese native speakers of Japanese

With regard to the employment of the address terms, including the hearer's name, greetings, attention-getters, and hesitation, American students used the address terms four times more than the Japanese students: 4.2 address terms per American speaker were employed, compared with 1 address term per Japanese speaker in a total of ten different types of situations. It shows that addressing the hearer's name before starting up a conversation, or making a request, is more commonly done by American native speakers of English than by the native speakers of Japanese. In Japanese the subjects "you" and "I" as well as the hearer's or the speaker's names are often omitted in conversations.

As for the pre-request activities, native speakers of English used 26.9 utterances per person in pre-requests as opposed to 11.25 utterances per person for native speakers of Japanese. That means American students made pre-request utterances more than twice as many times as Japanese students did. Pre-requests include statements of imposition, principle/philosophy, hinting, the explicit statement of a problem, and the explicit statement of a favor as well as the explanation of situations or reasons and the reciprocation or returning of debt.

Concerning the head act of requesting, American students made an average of 16.8 utterances per person, while Japanese students made an average of 7.75 utterances per person in ten given situations. This shows that American students made approximately twice as many utterances in the head act of making requests as the Japanese students.

Regarding the average number of post-request utterances per person, American students made 18.9 post-request utterances while Japanese students made 3.45 follow-up

utterances after their requests. That is, over five times more utterances were made in English than Japanese during the post-requesting section. Post-requests include the acts of reducing the hearer's burden by stating cost minimizers or giving options to the hearer, making promises, offering suggestions, and asking for the hearer's opinions as well as expressing the speaker's opinions, mentioning the rewards, confirming the hearer's acceptance, explaining the situations or reasons, and expressing the speaker's appreciation.

More utterances made by American speakers than Japanese speakers in pre-requests, request, and post-requests suggest that American speakers were more verbose in making requests itself as well as giving cushion statements before and after the core act of making requests to their friends and social equals. The following section will look at a total of nine patterns of request orders observed in our empirical data.

3. The Patterns of Request Orders

Table 3. Patterns of Request Orders

	AE (n=10)	JJ(n=10)
The number of cases of requests	**<96 cases>**	**<188 cases>**
Patterns of Request Orders with Pre-requests:	**79 (82.4%)**	**176 (93.6%)**
1. Pre-request	3 (3.1%)	3 (1.6%)
2. Pre-request/Request	② 20 (21%)	① 118 (62.8%)
3. Pre-/Request/Post-	① 43 (44.8%)	② 41 (21.8%)
4. Pre-/Request/Post-/Request	④ 10 (10.4%)	③ 14 (7.4%)
5. Pre-/Request/Post-/Request/Post-	3 (3.1%)	0 (0%)
Patterns of Request Orders without Pre-requests:	**17 (17.6%)**	**12 (6.4%)**
6. Request	1 (1%)	3 (1.6%)
7. Request/Pos-request	3 (3.1%)	④ 6 (3.2%)
8. Request/Post-/Request	0 (0%)	3 (1.6%)
9. Request/Post-/Request/Post-	③ 13 (13.5%)	0 (0%)

NB: The address terms are not included in the pre-request category

As Table 3 indicates, a total of nine patterns of request orders were observed in our empirical data, in which five were requests made with pre-requests and the other four were requests made without pre-requests. Considering the nature of the requests, it is understandable that most of the requests are made with some kind of cushion statements before the bottom line message, i.e. pre-request utterances before the core act of making requests both in English and Japanese. In English 82.4% of requests were made after pre-requests, and in Japanese 93.6% of requests were made after pre-request utterances. A sample of [Pre-request+Request+Post-request] in English and a sample of [Request+Post-

request] in Japanese are described as follows:

A sample of a English request:

"(Friend's name. / *You know, I'm studying Japanese and I have to write a paper*
<The hear's name> <Pre-request>

and it's so difficult for me . / *Would you mind looking it over and checking it for me./*
<Request>

Just for uh grammar mistakes 'cause I'm so bad at that."
<Post-request>

A sample of a Japanese request:

"Ah, / *ashita kuruma nokkete kunnnai?* / *Ashita asa nimotsuga ooikara"*
<Attention-getter> <Request> <Post-request>

Among those nine patterns, Japanese students used the pattern of [Pre-request+Request] most (62.8% of cases), followed by [Pre-request+Request+Post-request] (21.8%), [Pre-request+Request+Post-request+Request] (7.4%), and [Request+Post-reqeust] (3.2%). With regard to American native speakers of English, the most frequently employed pattern was [Pre-request+Request+Post-request] (44.8% of cases), and the second most [Pre-request+Request] (21%), followed by [Request+Post-reqeust+Request+Post-request] (13.5%) and [Pre-request+Request+Post-request+Request] (10.4%).

As for the non-use of pre-requests, more American informants made requests without pre-request utterances (17.6%) compared with the requests made by Japanese (6.4%). However, American students used more address terms (as shown earlier in the Table 2) and a repetition of a request and a post-request in one request. That is, the [Request+Post-+Request+Post-] pattern was used among 13.5% of their requests whereas none of the Japanese repeated the [Request+Post-request] pattern. Therefore, requests made by Americans do not necessarily indicate the abrupt and blatant nature of requests they made with their friends.

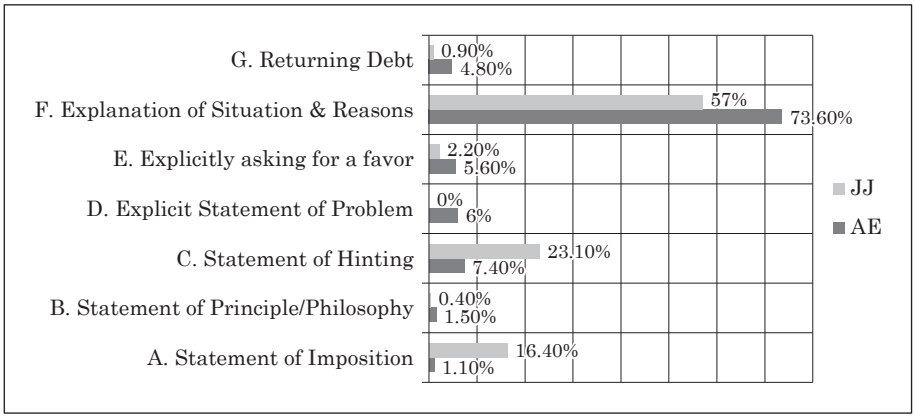
In terms of making a request without any cushion statements before or after the head act, slightly more Japanese (1.6%) than Americans (1%) use the pattern of only requests. Requests without any follow-up statements may be interpreted as rude depending on the situations, however it may also indicate a close relationship the speakers have in mind with the hearers (their friends). It may also reflect the tendency of Japanese relying on the expectation of *"Ishindenshin"* (telepathic communication of minds)--mutual understanding of each other's desires or needs without the explicit verbal exchange of words--especially

among friends. The Japanese speakers, having grown up in a high-context culture, tend to expect the hearers to understand what they want by even only expressing hints of their needs. The hearers are also expected to often read the speakers' minds and understand the intention of the speakers without their verbose expressions of requests.

4. The Strategies of Making Requests

In this section, strategies native speakers of American English and native speakers of Japanese used in pre-and post-requests will be focused on, and the contents of the adjuncts to requests, supportive moves of both pre-requests and post-requests will be analyzed. Table 4-1 shows the contents of pre-requests and how often these contents or strategies are used by the speakers before their moving on to the core act of requesting.

Table 4-1. Strategies of Making Requests: the Contents of Pre-Requests



Among all the pre-request strategies employed, the explanations of the situations the speakers were in or the statement of reasons for the requests were made most by both American and Japanese students. However, in terms of the percentage of this strategy being used, American students employed this strategy more (73.6%) than Japanese students (57%).

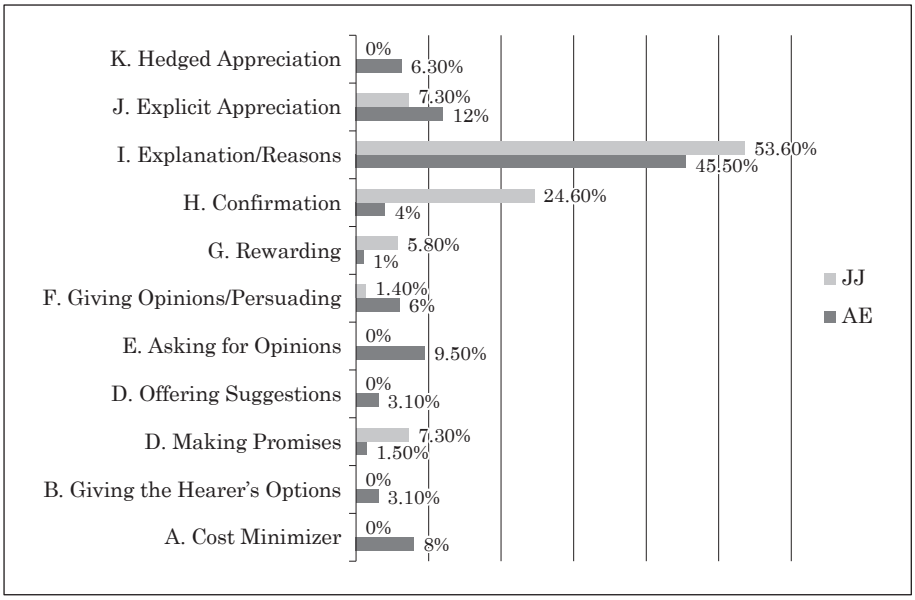
The big differences in the contents of pre-requests between American students and Japanese students were the statements of imposition, hinting and problems. Besides the explanations of situations or reasons, the other strategies frequently used by Japanese students in making requests were to hint at their requests (23.1%) and to state the imposing nature of the speech act (16.4%). For American students, on the other hand, only 7.4% of their utterances suggested or gave hints that requests would follow after the pre-

request utterances, and only 1.1% of their utterances mentioned about the imposition on the hearer.

Another noticeable difference was that although American students explicitly stated the problems in 6% of utterances before they asked for favors, none of the Japanese informants talked about their problems explicitly.

Table 4-2 shows the contents of post-requests and how often these contents or strategies were used after the head act of requests.

Table 4-2. Strategies of Making Requests: the Contents of Post-Requests



As for the content of post-requests, explanations and reasons for the requests were most commonly given by both American (45.5% of post-requests) and Japanese students (53.6% of post-requests). In terms of the number of utterances, American students made more utterances (86) than Japanese students (37 utterances) when they explained about the situations or the reasons for requests.

The major difference found in the frequency of semantic formula in English and Japanese requests is that a more variety of semantic formula was used in English than in Japanese. For example, in Japanese the speakers did not use the strategies of reducing the hearer's burden—i.e., no use of cost minimizers or giving the hearer options. No suggestions were offered nor hearer's opinions about the speaker's request were asked either in Japanese. Also, the appreciation was expressed only explicitly in Japanese whereas both

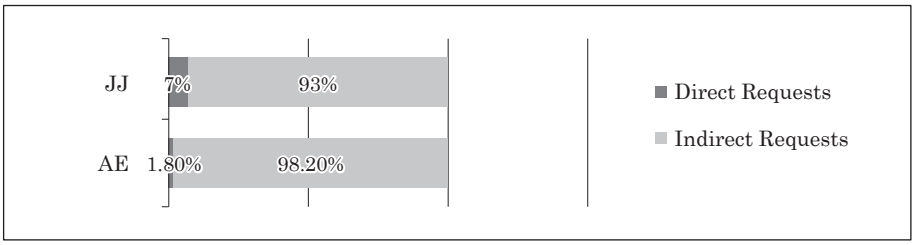
explicit and hedged appreciation were expressed in English.

Among other utterances during the post-requests, confirming the hearer's availability (24.6% of utterances), making promises to return a favor (7.3%), or rewarding the hearer for doing a favor to the speaker (5.8%) were the strategies that Japanese students employed more frequently than the American students when they made requests in their respective native languages: 4% confirmation, 1.5% promises, and 1% rewarding were mentioned in English.

5. The Structure and Frequency of the "Head Acts" of Requests

In this section, the structure of the head acts of making requests in English and Japanese will be examined. Table 5-1 shows the ratio of direct and indirect requests used by American and Japanese students.

Table 5-1. Structure of Head Acts of Making Requests



The empirical data collected shows that the head act of requests both American and Japanese students made consist mostly of indirect utterances. 98.2% of utterances American students made represented indirect requests in English, while 93% of utterances

Table 5-2. Structure and Frequency of Direct and Indirect Requests

Making Requests (the number of utterances)	AE (n=10) **168**	JJ (n=20) **155**
1. Direct	**3 (1.8%)**	**11 (7%)**
A. Imperative	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
B. Imperative+"please."	3 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
C. 'Please.'	0 (0%)	④ 11 (7%)
D. Performative ("request")	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. Indirect	**165 (98.2%)**	**144 (93%)**
A. Interrogative	① 71 (42.2%)	② 51 (33%)
B. Declarative	④ 21 (12.5%)	0 (0%)
C. Embedded 'if-clause'	③ 30 (18%)	① 60 (38.7%)
D. "I wonder if....."	② 39 (23.2%)	③ 23 (14.8%)
E. Suggestive ("Let's~/Shall we?")	⑤ 4 (2.3%)	⑤ 10 (6.5%)

Japanese students made represented indirect requests in Japanese.

Table 5-2 shows the structure and frequency of direct and indirect requests collected in the study. Among a few direct requests, 7% of the Japanese utterances used “please (onegai)” independently, whereas in English the word “please” was used with imperative statements, not by itself. Similarities found in data are that imperatives and performatives (i.e. the word “request” itself) were not used in either English or Japanese.

As for indirect requests, the most frequently used forms were interrogatives (questions) (42.2%) followed by “I wonder if~” (23.2%) and embedded ‘if-clause” statements (18%) in English. On the other hand, in Japanese head acts of requests, embedded ‘if-clause” statements (38.7%) were most frequently used, which followed by interrogatives (33%) and “I wonder if~” statements (14.8%). Other differences observed were that declaratives used in English (12.5%) were not used in Japanese and that Japanese students offered more suggestives such as “Let’s~” or “ Shall we~?” (6.5%) than American students (2.3%) in their indirect requests.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper examined the comparative features of the realization patterns of requests in English and Japanese. Similarities and differences in the strategies of making requests between native speakers of English and Japanese were investigated by collecting empirical data. With regard to the data collection, the oral responses, instead of written responses to DCTs were used, in order to elicit spontaneous speech, which reflects the features of natural conversations, such as the use of address terms, attention-getters, hesitation, pause fillers, the repetition of words and exclamations which show the speakers’ emotions.

However, as Labov’s (1972) “observer’s paradox” points out, the existence of the interlocutor may have influenced the outcome of the informants’ talk, especially when the informants did not know the interlocutor. Furthermore, although Rose (1991) has found no significant effect of including or excluding of the hearer responses on written requests elicited, except that the responses on no-hearer DCTs are slightly longer and use more supportive moves and downgraders, questions still remain as to the effects of no-hearer responses in oral response to the DCTs.

Another issue is the difficulty of comparing two languages that constitute different sentence structures and expressions to realize certain speech acts. As Kasper (1990) voiced the concern, “Conversations such as routine formulae and idiomatic expressions tend to be

language specific and thus would not be expected to have formal or even functional equivalences across languages."

Despite the limitations of a small preliminary study and the difficult nature of cross-linguistic comparison using oral DCTs, similarities and differences are revealed as to the strategies both native speakers of English and Japanese use in performing the face-threatening act of requests. Similarities found in the strategies of making requests in both English and Japanese are that both employ the semantic formula which consists of address terms, pre-request statements or questions, the head act of requests, and post-requests. This semantic formula is used in a variety of combinations. In making questions which can be face-threatening, both English and Japanese speakers used indirect expressions, such as "I wonder if ~" statements or "embedded if ~" sentences. Japanese sometimes used the word "onegai" or "onegaishimasu (please)" independently at the end of the requests, whose usage was specific to Japanese speakers in our data.

As for the number of utterances employed in making requests, American university students were more verbose than Japanese university students. Compared with Japanese students, American students spoke three times more in asking their friends for favors or making requests. For example, American English speakers used four times more address terms (e.g. names, greetings, attention-getters, hesitation, etc.), two times more pre-requests and requests, and five times more post-requests than Japanese speakers. American English speakers also employed more patterns of request orders: they used eight patterns of request orders while Japanese speakers used seven patterns.

As for the commonly employed pattern, [Pre-request+Request+Post-request] was most frequently used by American native speakers of English whereas the [Pre-request+Request] pattern was most frequently adopted by native speakers of Japanese. In terms of strategies they used in both pre-requests and post-requests, American speakers used seven strategies in pre-requests and eleven in post-request as opposed to six strategies in pre-requests and another six strategies in post-requests employed by Japanese speakers. Both speakers used explanations of situations and reasons for requests most frequently as pre-requests and post-requests. The differences were that Japanese speakers hinted at requests or mentioned imposition of the requests in pre-requests and confirmed the hearers' possibility of giving favors to the hearers more frequently than American speakers of English. On the other hand, American speakers of English more frequently offered the hearers' options and minimized the hearers' costs in accepting the requests in pre-requests as well as addressed

both explicit and hedged appreciation in the post-requests than Japanese speakers.

The comparative study of native speakers of American English and Japanese ways of making requests revealed certain characteristics of these two languages and the strategies people adopt in asking favors of their friends in respective native languages. Based on these findings, in the future research we would like to conduct research focusing on the L1 effects on L2 speech acts, which will give important insights into the complex feature of the language learner's pragmatic competence. Furthermore, we would also like to explore the relationship between the level of L2 speakers' proficiencies and their use of L2 in the speech acts of making requests—i.e., the features of pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 in the future studies.

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APPENDIX

Discourse Completion Task: Oral Responses to Questionnaire

Instructions: Please read the following 10 situations that require you to ask your friend a favor. Give specific reasons for your request in each situation.

1. Your personal computer is broken. Ask your friend who has the same type of computer if you can borrow his or hers for a couple of days.

2. You and your friend go to the same school. You usually take the bus or subway to school but your friend drives to school. Ask your friend if she or he can give you a ride to school tomorrow morning.

3. You need to write a paper in the foreign language you are studying. Ask a friend who is a native speaker of that language if she or he can proofread your paper tonight.

4. You couldn't take good notes on today's lecture in class. Ask your classmate if she or he can lend you her or his notes/notebook.

5. You have a ticket to see a play/musical/ concert, etc. on Thursday night, but you find out that you cannot go that night. Ask your friend if she or he would like to buy your ticket.

6. You and you friend are window shopping and you find something you want to buy, but you don't have enough money. Ask your friend if you can borrow some money from her/him.

7. You don't have a DVD/TV/VCR. Ask your friend who has a DVD/TV/VCR to record a TV program you would like to watch.

8. Your friends are visiting you but you can't be with them on Sunday afternoon. Ask your friend to show them around town for you.

9. You have difficulty in understanding one of the classes you are taking. Ask your classmate if she or he would study with you before the midterms.

10. You have an errand to do, but don't want to go by yourself. Ask your friend to go with you.